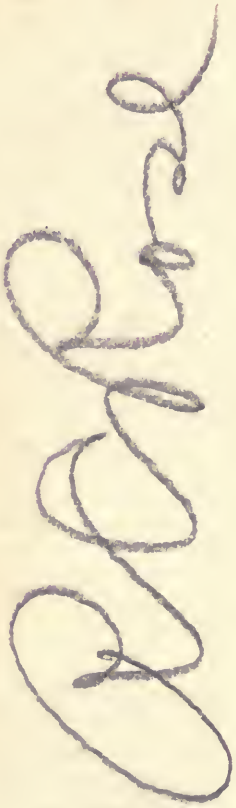
American

Push



American Bush.

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AMERICAN PUSH.

BY

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AMERICAN PUSH.

I.

ALL day the wind had stung as it blew beneath a sky of slate. Even Gramercy Park looked bleak and cheerless while a brougham of elegant trim, with two liveried men on its box, rattled up to the door of a mansion just south of Irving Place. The inmate, a young man, wrapped to his ears in a huge coat lined with sable, remained inside his carriage until the footman's bell-ring had been answered. Then he lightly bounded forth upon the pavement, and ran up the stoop into the open doorway, which was immediately closed behind him by another footman inside the hall.

"Is everything ready, Jameson?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man, as his young master slipped out of the coat and let its big, sumptuous bulk drop into this third servant's waiting arms. A large mirror gleamed opposite the form which had thus lightly unsheathed itself, and its possessor, Alonzo Lispenard, gave a saucy stare at his own presentment. He saw a man in the later twenties, of excellent height and build, though of meager personal beauty. Bronze eyes, with a merry spark in them, and waved hair of silky yellow, did their best to keep

the face from being commonplace. An impudent nose somewhat aided it — a nose with an airy upward slant and little arches to flank either nostril. Some of Alonzo's friends used to say that this feature accounted for many of his audacities.

"Oh, I think I'll do," he exclaimed, half to himself and half, as it were, to Jameson, who grinned serenely. "If they don't like me this way they'll have to take me, all the same." He wheeled round on one heel and hurried to the staircase. He had reached the middle of it, taking two steps at a time, when he suddenly paused, and called over one shoulder :

"Oh, Jameson, are the carpet and the awning out there ? I forgot to notice."

"No, sir, not yet. But they're sure to be in time, Mr. Lispenard."

Alonzo fronted the speaker, and shook with vehemence an upraised forefinger. "Now, Jameson," he cried, "if anything goes wrong to-day you'll not forget it till your dying hour. To say that you'll merely be discharged, isn't anything. I'll have you traced by detectives to the uttermost parts of the earth, and the instant you try to get a new place, they'll prevent you."

He sprang upstairs again, still two steps at a time, while Jameson watched him with eyes that twinkled fondly. Just as he disappeared, the new English valet, Fletcher, sauntered from back regions. This person had a sneer on his clean-shorn upper lip as he muttered to Jameson :

"Well, if he *ain't* one o' the reg'lar bloomin', lah-de-dah, strike-ye-with-a-feather kind! I wonder how you could stand him for so long a time. I begin to be pretty sure that I can't."

Jameson colored and scowled. He greatly liked his young master. To new eyes and ears Alonzo's manner was no doubt effeminate. He often chose to use the treble notes of a voice that was not devoid of bass ones, and he gave to his body a too mercurial twirl, to his shoulders a too facile shrug. His laugh had sometimes a girl's own shrillness, and he sometimes used his hands in gestures that were so many challenges to dignity. But those who knew him best knew him for an athlete of skill, a rider of pluck, a keen sportsman when laziness let him shoot or hunt, and a mental force replete with every opposite of womanish trends and tastes.

The new valet had been in office hardly a week yet, and here was not the first slur that his fellow-servants had heard fall from his lips. He had chosen a dangerous atmosphere in which to vent his aversion, and this fact was soon made clear to him in no careful terms. "Look out, my young sprig o' conceit," growled Jameson, whose gray-touched little thickets of side-whisker seemed to bristle as he spoke, "or you'll find that the gent you've engaged with 'll send you flyin' before you've had the chance to give warnin'. And without a rec'mendation, too. Yes, sir, you needn't look sour and uppish. Mr. Lispenard won't mind that. If you take him for what you've just

called him you'll get so left you won't know Monday from Saturday week."

The new valet (who was thought to wear stays) put a neat white hand on either hip. He had been in this country three or four years, and had learned not to squander his h's. But in the excitement of repartee he now forsook a few of them. With "bloomin'," "blarsted," and an occasional "bloody" as his recurrent adjectives, he declared himself anxious to learn of Jameson why he so admired Mr. Lispenard. And Jameson swiftly told him.

"He's got his harum-scarum ways," announced the butler, in tart semitone, "but he's every inch a gentleman behind 'em. His foolin's only like the white of an egg with a big yelk to it. When I was sick in the hospital, two years ago, he went to see me twice a week, and put me in a room that must 'a' cost him a hundred dollars a month if it cost a cent. The man that was here just before you, got drunk three times, and was forgiven, and at last, when the rascal stole a scarf-pin worth seventy dollars, he had to pack, but Mr. Lispenard shook him by the hand — yes, sir — before he quitted these doors with his dirty feet, and told him that he hoped with all his soul not goin' to prison this time would teach him a lesson for the rest of his life. Think o' *that*, when the police was spoilin' for the mean devil, and Mr. Lispenard could 'a' had him sent up by the wave of a finger! . . . And he gives to the poor! Lord, sir! I've seen him bring tramps into this very hall that made me itch to look at 'em. And I don't itch easy, neither,"

pursued Jameson, with a fresh scowl meant to be deeply august in its convincing agency. . . .

Meanwhile, the object of this eulogium (which went flowing on, to the mingled surprise and amusement of its hearer) had reached the drawing-rooms on the higher floor and had paused there, surveying their quiet splendors. There were three rooms in all, the first and second spacious, the third a little smaller, being in fact a dining-room, but large enough for a good-sized throng to feast in, as many a good-sized throng had done. Their curtains had been drawn; the clusters of side-lights had been lit. There was no profusion of ornament. You had a sense of heavy falling tapestries, of occasional pictures, each in itself a gem-like masterpiece, of cushions piled in alcoves, of just a few white-glimmering bits of sculpture; of an exquisite little antique head here and a bit of choice Japanese enameling there. But no huddled masses offended the eye, which roved easily from one point of elegance to the next, finding nothing inferior, nothing with the faintest tarnish of cheapness.

Alonzo had just stooped to bury his nose in a huge basket of fresh violets, when a voice from a near alcove called to him:

"For Heaven's sake, go and dress!"

Alonzo gave a sharp start. "Good gracious, Phil, is that you?"

"Yes," replied Philip Lexington, rearranging a cushion to suit his shoulder-blades. "I found you out, drifted upstairs, got hold of this revolting French

book, and have wallowed in its corruption ever since. I really should think, Lonz," he continued, with an autocratic little pull at one end of the dark mustache which so well became his olive and oval face, "that in your French reading you might draw the line *somewhere.*"

"I draw it at just such abominations," returned Alonzo. "True, the leaves of that horror were cut, but they've only been skimmed, and not all of them, either."

Rising on the great, deep couch of tufted silk, Lexington drew out his watch. "Well, more shame for me, I've actually spent half-an-hour with it. And, my dear boy, you'll forgive me for making myself so terribly at home in your absence, won't you, now?"

"That's what you're always saying," laughed his host, "and you're always forgiven, and there's never anything to forgive." Here Alonzo threw himself into a chair. "By the way, you're to be my best man next April, if you will. *Will* you?"

Lexington's dark face flushed a little. "*Will* I? Thanks, immensely, Lonz. I—I thought you'd ask Winthrop Delavan."

"Did you? Well, you see I haven't. So you accept?"

"Accept! Is there a man you know that wouldn't be delighted?"

"Oh, don't put it that way."

"But I do put it that way," persisted Lexington.

He left the alcove, and dropped into a great satin

easy-chair near Alonzo, wheeling it still nearer. He was of good family, good position, but he had the reputation of being a snob, who only courted the rich and socially powerful. He possessed a very small income, and was a notorious idler. Alonzo had made him several large loans during the past few years, and not a dime had yet been returned. Society, however, had no shred of proof that this was true. But it criticised the intimacy, and drew its own rather cynical deductions.

"I often tell myself, old fellow," Lexington went on, "that you're the most modest man in creation. Who you are quite escapes you, and as for what you are—an artist of splendid talents—you never seem to give it a thought."

"*Who* I am?" came the airy reply. "Oh, in the name of common-sense, Phil, don't try to gammon me by any suggestion that I'm anybody from the patrician point of view. Kitty and I came of respectable stock, that's all, and you know it as well as I do. When your ancestors, the Lexingtons, were swells in New York a hundred years ago, mine, the Lispenards, were probably carpenters, grocers, perhaps even bricklayers. I had a lucky father, who founded a big banking-house, and educated his two children. If there were any real aristocracy in this funny, pretentious town, I wouldn't have the ghost of a claim to call myself a part of it. I'm no more a Knickerbocker than I'm a Carolus Duran or a Bonnat."

"You're a very powerful artist, though," insisted Lexington.

"Bosh, my boy! I've got a little talent and a tremendous amount of ambition. If I'd been born poor and obscure, my present employment would no doubt have been one of picturesque starvation."

Lexington heaved a reproachful little sigh. "Then you think I praise you," he began, sadly, "for no other reason than because"——

Alonzo jumped up from his chair and caught his friend's hand between both his own. "I don't think anything so nasty of you!" he cried, in the shrill, eccentric voice he sometimes used. "Come up into the studio, and let's look at *her* picture. I gave it a few fresh touches this morning. I suppose they're the last. But I've been saying that (idiot that I am!) ever since her final sitting, which was two weeks ago yesterday."

He shot out of the room at his usual brisk amble, and Lexington followed him. . . . The studio, a great northern chamber, blazed with gorgeousness. Through an immense window the light poured upon yards of costly tissues and hundreds of curios. On an easel was the portrait to which Alonzo had just referred. He stood staring at it for several moments with folded arms.

"Dear old Eric Thaxter!" he said. "You always told me the truth. You swore I could only paint about one good picture every five years, and I believe you were right. Was there *ever* such a slow coach?"

"Eric Thaxter?" muttered Lexington. "I remember him at school in Vevey."

"We afterward studied together at the same *atelier* in Paris. Eric wasn't cut out for a painter, perhaps, but he's done wonders over there as an architect. See this." . . . And he handed Lexington a letter. "He's drifted into the good graces of the young King of Saltravia; he's built a new royal palace, which they say is a grand success."

"And he's very anxious for you to come on and make him a visit," said Lexington, while scanning the letter.

"Oh, yes. He thinks me a wonderful art-critic, though the completest failure as a painter."

"How obliging of him," said Lexington, coldly. He had for some time felt a vague jealousy of this Eric Thaxter, whom Alonzo would so often mention, even amid the flurry and whirl of the life he led.

"Read on, Phil, and you'll see. Eric thinks there's no one with such a *flair* as I for what's genuine in art. The young King, who is absurdly rich considering the smallness of his realm, is anxious for somebody to prowl through the old Italian monasteries and exhume forgotten masterpieces, besides buying at modern sales everything that shows transcendent merit."

"And actually he thinks you would accept such a position as that!" sneered Lexington. "Upon my word, Lonz, it strikes me as almost an insult. Does your friend suggest any salary?"

Alonzo suppressed a yawn. "No. I dare say the

grandeur of knowing His Majesty would be thought sufficient."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, come, now," cried Alonzo, slapping his friend on the shoulder, "it's all only a little scheme on Eric's part to have me go over and hobnob with him in Saltravia."

"And so he baits his invitation with the prospect of meeting a king."

"Oh, poor, dear Eric! Not at all. I don't doubt he's aware I've met several." Here Alonzo began to count with one hand on the outspread fingers of the other. "They've all been so nice to me, too. Let me think. First, there was the Prince, in London, year before last. But, no . . . he isn't a king, is he?"

"Oh, he'll pass for one. I remember, you saw him a lot of times."

"Through Daisy Bostwick, you know. She and I were such tremendous chums before she married."

"Daisy Bostwick," smiled Lexington. "That's American, I suppose, for the Marchioness of Middlesex."

"Yes, I've played more than one game of poker at the Middlesexes' in Grosvenor Square, with H. R. H. . . . Then there was Umberto, at Rome. Of course he was nice to me because he and the Queen both adore Bessie Southgate, who used to go to school with my sister Kitty, and is now the Princess Carrioli; and Bessie was simply sweet to us the minute she heard we were in Rome. And . . . let me think; haven't I any more royalties to brag

about? Yes, there was the King of Servia, whom I took supper with in Paris, year before last, and — oh, I'd forgotten — I was presented in Berlin, the same year, at a great ball somewhere, to the Emperor of Ger —— But no; he wasn't Emperor then; he was only Crown Prince. So my list is a pretty small one, after all, isn't it?"

"It's large enough for you to snap your fingers at a minor potentate like the King of Saltravia. . . . By the way, Lonz, your people will soon be arriving. Why *don't* you dress?"

"Dress?" cried Alonzo, lifting both hands and whirling himself round while he surveyed his attire. "Isn't this good enough, in the name of sanity?"

"In the name of decency," replied Lexington, "it isn't. A velveteen sack-coat and a big tempestuous-looking neck-tie of brick-dust red silk! It won't do at all. You've lots of swagger afternoon things. Ring for your man, and make him put you into one of your new London suits. It's positively shameful that you should go down-stairs in those Bohemian togs. Your sister, Mrs. Van Santvoord, will be furious."

"Oh, Kitty's always grumbling at me. I don't mind *her*."

"But this is the first home entertainment you've given to Miss Kennaird."

"True," said Alonzo, while his rattling manner seemed to soften. "But, my dear Phil," he suddenly resumed, throwing back his head, and making flighty gestures with both hands, "if there's one thing that dear Kathleen of mine likes about me, it's to have me

be myself. True, she's conventional enough; but, ah! when I think of that adorable girl, she reconciles me to all the sham and trash of the life we live and the way we live it."

Lexington furtively gnawed his lip. He had his own secret cynical ideas about the sincerity of this new sweetheart whom his young millionaire friend had chosen.

"Oh, well," he returned, rather grimly, "if you want to defy convention, it doesn't matter. You're so popular that you can. Nobody minds. They all accept you, and like you the better for being yourself, since it's yourself they're so fond of."

"Fond!" echoed Alonzo, and with so harshly unwonted a ring in his voice that it made his hearer start and stare. He let his flexible frame sink down on the broad arm of an easy-chair near which he had been standing, and his tawny eyes had never shone with stronger seriousness than while he now continued to speak.

"You good, kind-hearted Phil! Don't you see that my popularity is the merest myth? When I do bold or queer things, it isn't I whom they laugh at and make believe that they think funny; it's a fellow with a few thousands a year that he squanders on their amusement. Let fate strip me of those, Phil, and they'd think me as ordinary as their morning bath. I don't want to be a cynic, and, if I did, there are some few things that would save me from it. You're one of them"——

I?"

"Yes. You ring right, somehow — at least, to my ears you do!"

"Thanks."

"And then, there's Kathleen. Ah, *she* rings right! She's like a perpetual chime of silver bells."

"Which you will soon turn into wedding-bells."

"In April, my boy. . . . You remember, Phil, how I hated the thought of marriage till I met her. Then everything changed. I felt like a transformation scene in a pantomime. That big, solid lump of prejudice in me gave a sort of click, and there it was, a church-altar, with a clergyman or two behind it, looking round to see whom they could marry. . . . And do you know why that lovely girl has captured me? Because I believe she's without one speck of sham. It isn't her beauty, or her brains, or her power of charming you — for she's got all three. It's her mighty genuineness, Phil. She often seems to me, beside the women I meet her with, like a live flower that's lost its way among a basket of false ones. Her petals (the darling!) were not purchased at a fancy-shop. They came fresh from the loom of Nature, who spun them with her heart in her work. I find there's so much in that, by the bye. Nature's made such crowds and crowds of us not caring whether Brown was to be a poet or a politician, Jones a deacon or a dentist. It's only when she goes to work in dead earnest that she turns out her magnificent men and women." He clasped both hands together with a fervor that in almost any one else

would have been solely comic. "And Kathleen Kennaird is one of the last!"

"I wonder," said Lexington, dryly, and yet with a polite air of venture, "whether you have any feelings of this sort about Mrs. Kennaird, her mother."

Alonzo broke into a high and hearty laugh. "She's worldliness itself!" he cried. "Who doubts it? But she's a very picturesque figure. I like to look at her. She sweeps through life so. Her chief idea of being happy is to don a new gown and 'meet people.' She's tremendous as an incarnate idea. I should like to paint her as that. If I only could! It would be a great picture. Her eye-glasses would be half lifted, and her head would be a good deal thrown back, and there would be billows of silk or satin below her waist, and she would have her arms and neck bared, for they're really superb, and — Well, Fletcher." The last two words were addressed to his valet, who had just appeared at the open doorway. Guests had begun to arrive, and Alonzo hastened down-stairs to receive them. Almost the first greeting he received was one from his sister, Mrs. Van Santvoord. "Lonz," she said, "what on earth do you mean by turning up in that scandalous coat?"

"It isn't scandalous, Kitty; it's representative." He appealed, in his least reposeful style, to a great lady of fashion who stood at his sister's side. "I'm issuing an edict," he went on, with that kind of intimate and hysteric loquacity by which he had contrived to shock and yet to amuse many associates,

"I intend saying, 'Let there be velvet coats at afternoon teas,' and there shall be velvet coats."

The lady, a handsome brunette, *grande dame* to her finger-tips, gave an obstinate shake of her neat-bonneted head.

"No," she declared. "I, for one, sha'n't agree to any rule so rowdy."

"Rowdy!" shouted Alonzo. He caught one of her gloved hands and peered into her face with his eyes quizzically twinkling. "Lily, you're a horrid thing, and I'll never be friends with you any more. You don't love me, Lily. You know you don't!"

It was the madness of silliness, and impertinence as well. Lilian Poughkeepsie was one of the leaders of the most exclusive set. People rarely addressed her except in terms of strictest courtesy, and her social nod was potent enough to unbar for a struggler the gilded and filigreed gates of the Four Hundred.

Mrs. Van Santvoord, who revered Mrs. Poughkeepsie's position, drew back with a gasp of "Oh, Alonzo, how *can* you?"

Mrs. Poughkeepsie remained speechless, with hardening face. But Alonzo didn't mind that. "You see," he exclaimed, appealing to his sister. "Lily *doesn't* love me, and I'm going to receive everybody else in my shirt-sleeves." He took off the velvet coat and bundled it under one arm. "This," he continued, "is to be my despairing posture for the rest of the afternoon." He struck so ridiculous an attitude that Mrs. Poughkeepsie burst into an unwilling scream of mirth. She forgave him, just as everybody else did

—just as he had been forgiven last week at a very select cotillon for pretending drunkenness, and tumbling flat on his back in the middle of the ball-room. And now, while he was re-clothing himself, a number of people pressed about him, principally ladies, inquiring what his last madness had meant, and prepared to roar with laughter at it before they had heard it explained.

But a little group remained apart, and in this was a young man who detested him, though glad enough to appear at his festal summons.

"Oh, it's only some new caddish prank," said the young man. "He's always behaving like that."

"But he wakes people up so," said a girl who was not a belle and to whom he had been kind.

"You wouldn't say that of *me*," replied the young man, "if *I* were to carry on so outrageously."

The girl gave a pout and a toss of the head. "You're not Alonzo Lispenard," she retorted.

"You mean that I haven't got two millions of dollars," whispered the young man in her ear, "and that I can't throw away fifty thousand every year of my life in dinners and dances and frolics for my friends."

The girl chose to ignore this burst of bitterness. "Look," she said. "There's Miss Kennaird, just coming in with her mother. How sobered he gets as he goes to greet her. They say she doesn't approve of his larking style."

"Well she may not. How beautiful she is."

"Do you think so?" shrugged the girl. "She's

too tall, for my taste, and then I don't like her eyes. They're like ice."

"Blue ice — or green, if you please — with a blaze of sun on it. Besides, the long curls of their black lashes help them so. And she has a face as delicate as an orchid."

"How can she wear that black velvet trimmed with sables?" pursued the girl. "They say these Kennairds have but four thousand a year to live on."

"Oh, make it five."

"Nobody really knows *just* how much. But still, they're *poor*. Do you suppose it's possible that . . ." And here the girl lowered her voice, which a sweet clash of hidden violins would in any case have drowned an instant later.

Kathleen Kennaird smiled right and left, but it seemed to certain observers that her manner toward her accepted suitor was peculiarly cold. This little afternoon tea, as he chose to call it, was given in her honor. Not more than thirty people had been asked, and those were the ones Kathleen had specially desired. Tea, it is true, was served in the most exquisite porcelain cups; but this potion proved, as it were, only an excuse for other refreshments. Almost before they knew it the guests found themselves seated at little tables, eating terrapin and sipping frozen champagne. Then, in a short while, a soprano voice was heard, singing from *Tristan*. "That's Lili Lehmann, or I'll be shot," presently muttered Lexington, who knew nothing of this surprise, so characteristic of Alonzo; and soon the great

singer appeared, conducted by the host himself, her beautiful face wreathed in smiles. Nearly all the women crowded about her with cries of gratulation and welcome. Amid the general clamor Kathleen Kennaird took the chance of saying to her lover:

"You have been doing another wild thing."

"What *do* you mean?" he queried, with infantile innocence.

"Oh, last night at the Merrymakers' Club. You'll not deny, surely, that you blacked your face and went in at dessert to the large dinner Harry Madison was giving, as a negro banjo-player; and that nobody found you out until a wisp of your light hair happened to show under your wig."

"That's really delicious!" Alonzo said. "My face was no more blacked than yours is now — and Heaven knows there are roses and lilies enough *there!* I'd promised to be at the dinner, and reached the Merrymakers' shamefully late. So I sent from the club for my banjo (which, by the way, I detest as an instrument, and play horribly) merely for the purpose . . ."

Kathleen shook her head in a deploring way as he paused. "For the purpose of doing something horribly odd," she said. "Confess it; you may as well."

"But the blacking of the face is all nonsense. Johnny Chadwick got me a black mask from one of the waiters. I dare say it had been worn at some servants' masked ball, and happened to be lying about somewhere in the club. I put it on after sending for the banjo. It was all Johnny's idea — not the banjo, but the mask. I merely wanted to go into the dinner

with a little music, as I'd got there so scandalously late. Everything else that you've heard is the sheerest rubbish."

Kathleen laid a slim gloved hand on his arm. "Well, well," she faltered. "Allow that you were maligned that time, Alonzo. But your taking off your coat a few minutes before mamma and I appeared! Oh, I heard of it; never mind who told me. And these dreadful escapades of yours get into the newspapers. They must stop — out of respect to me, Alonzo, they *should* stop! You cheapen yourself by indulging in them! No one likes you the better for them, and things are said behind your back which you do not realize, because you trust your friends so implicitly."

"I don't trust many friends, Kathleen," came the low-voiced answer. "But I do trust *you*, and . . . you're the only real friend I have in the world. Now, believe me, there *shall* be a reformation. From this moment I promise one. When you marry me, next April, you shall marry a man who hasn't kicked up his heels for weeks."

The music burst forth again as Alonzo finished speaking. When the revelers were invited to reënter the two front drawing-rooms, chairs had been arranged for a cotillon. Philip Lexington led the dance with Mrs. Van Santvoord, at Alonzo's request. Through the first figure the participants imagined that it was only an impromptu dance. But suddenly they were called upon to take it more seriously, since, before the first figure ended, bouquets of the rarest flow-

ers had begun to circulate, and by six o'clock, when the final strains of the musicians were sounding, jeweled fans had been lavished on the ladies for favors, and the gentlemen had received cat's-eye scarf-pins set round with tiny pearls.

It had all been a sumptuous and yet charmingly tasteful tribute to the sweetheart of the host. People pressed Alonzo's hand in their ardent praise of his festivity, and told him that the entertainment had been a blended astonishment and delight. Mrs. Kennaird, who had not danced, but who had watched the cotillon, with her grand air at its grandest, whispered to her prospective son-in-law, just as he was slipping from the room, having in his hand a card which a servant had lately given him: "Your tribute to dear Kathleen has been perfectly enchanting."

"So glad you liked it, so glad," returned Alonzo, as he receded from the lofty lady's view. . . .

The card which he held was from his uncle, Mr. Crawford Lispenard, head of the great banking-house of Lispenard & Chichester.

"My dear Uncle Crawford!" he said, grasping the hand of a big man with iron-gray side-whiskers, who stood in the hall; "we meet so seldom, but, when we do meet, it shouldn't be like this. . . . I know you hate society, dear old boy; still, you'll come up and see my sweetheart, won't you? I'm giving her a little afternoon dance. You know, Uncle Crawford, you and she must meet, sooner or later. . . . Why, you're sort of pale and . . . queer-looking. What's the matter?"

"Alonzo," said Mr. Crawford Lispenard, in a husky voice, "I — I must speak with you, and speak quite privately."

Alonzo's eyes swept the face that he knew so well and dearly loved. This monetary potentate, this prince of finance, his dead father's trusted brother, who had been to himself and his sister such a model of all devoted guardianship, *in trouble!* It seemed incredible.

"You're somehow not yourself!" he exclaimed, momentarily careless of the watching footmen. "Oh, Uncle Crawford, it isn't —— ?" And he drew back, with a laugh on his lips, but an anxious cloud in his gaze. "It isn't any nonsense of mine that you've been hearing of ?

"No, no, Lonz. Can't we be alone together soon ? I'll come back later, or you'll come to me." And the gentleman, a little bewilderedly, turned toward the door, reaching forth a fluttered hand as if to grasp its knob.

Alonzo caught that hand between both his own. He had held it for an instant before, but not till then had he realized how cold it was.

"Light my studio at once," he said to a servant, recalling that the winter day had now completely darkened. The man sprang upstairs to obey his bidding, and Alonzo followed him at his uncle's side.

"The idea of your rushing off like that, Uncle Crawford ! You come here so seldom that you're not to be released so easily when you do come." . . .

The long, melodious wailings of the waltz-music

floated up to them as they ascended the stairs. After several seconds Alonzo suddenly turned to his companion.

"Upon my word, Uncle Crawford," he recommenced, "if there were any bad news that you *could* bring me, I should imagine you had brought it now."

Mr. Lispenard paused. They were at the door of the studio. He put a hand on his nephew's shoulder and stared gloomily down into his face.

"I do bring you bad news, my boy. I—I bring you horrible news," he said.

Alonzo felt himself whiten. In a flash he divined what was meant. It could only be one thing. The ground swung beneath his feet as he passed with his uncle across the threshold of the studio, and closed its door behind them both.

II.

MR. LISPENARD sank into one of the rich chairs. It chanced to be a Venetian piece of furniture, and his gaunt frame and elderly visage, both so clearly touched by modern meanings, made an odd contrast with the velvet and carvings of this archaic seat.

"You said — horrible news — Uncle Crawford?"

Alonzo dragged forth the words while his gaze wandered among the tumultuous beauties of the room, though it possibly did so without seeing one of them.

"Yes, my boy; the firm has gone. It's been Chichester's work. No one knew. I think some woman has been dragging him into the whole horror — a middle-aged man like that! He's drawn enormous sums and gambled them away. It must have been going on for a good while. You see, I was careless about the books. I left all that to Chichester; my confidence in him was so perfect. I might, of course, have suspected. I knew that he lived high, belonged to fashionable clubs, entertained troops of friends. But there was so much money for his share that I never dreamed he could even spend his own income from year to year. And all the while he was plunging into your money, into your sister's, into mine. There's one Wall Street operation alone by which he must have lost two millions. And he's been so infernally crafty, with it all! Even in dying he showed a cer-

tain devilish shrewdness, waiting till the very last enjoyable moment before he killed himself."

"Killed himself!" echoed Alonzo.

"Haven't you seen the evening papers?" replied his uncle. "Chichester was found in his bedroom, at two o'clock to-day, shot through the head, and evidently by his own hand."

There was now a silence, during which Alonzo stole up to his uncle's side and began to stroke that gentleman's grayish locks and pat one of his shoulders with affectionate fervor. "Uncle Crawford," he said, "you mustn't let this awful thing affect you too much. . . . Now that I look at you closer, I see just how jaded and upset you are. I'm so sorry for you — indeed, indeed I am!"

Crawford Lispenard's eyes filled with tears. He was called by the world a rather frigid old celibate, and he was known to live a lonely and loveless life. Perhaps in thirty years he had never really wept until now.

"You're sorry for *me*, Lonz?" he murmured. "And you don't think of yourself? . . . you don't think"——

"Oh, yes, I do," the nephew broke in. He went and touched a bell, coming back to his uncle's side, with a faint, fluttered laugh leaving his lips. "That is, I'm beginning to think of myself. But it's all so strange, so dazing, don't you know?"

When his bell-touch was answered he said a few words to the servant, who presently brought a goblet of champagne, which he insisted on having his uncle

sip. Then, when Mr. Lispenard had evidently felt the aiding effects of the stimulant, Alonzo went downstairs with him to his carriage. "I must turn up among my guests," he explained, "or they'll think this one of my rankest capers — and I'm always cutting up capers; at least everybody tells me so. There . . . go home, and I'll join you between now and ten o'clock, surely. Don't worry too much. Things may not be so frightfully bad for us, after all." And he insisted on going with his uncle down the stoop bare-headed into the biting air, and closing the carriage-door with his own hands.

Then he returned to his guests, who were wondering at his absence. He heard a voice whispering in his ears above the gay strains of the music. "You've lost everything," said the voice; "you and Kitty are paupers!" But when people asked him whither he had gone, he made light answers, and in the very teeth of a generally announced departure he bade the musicians strike up a polka and danced at his merriest pace with two or three different partners.

The farewells now followed, and except for Kathleen, her mother, his sister, Mrs. Van Santvoord, and five or six other loiterers, the rooms were soon deserted.

"You're to dine with us this evening," Kathleen said to him.

"No — I can't."

"You can't! Why? . . . Has anything happened?"

"Yes." And he quickly told her of the suicide of

his uncle's partner. "It will cause great trouble, you understand — pecuniary trouble. I am afraid that there is disgrace behind the suicide. It looks as if Chichester had robbed the firm of large amounts." He hated to tell her that his wealth had vanished into air, though he felt securely certain that she would brim with compassion and devotion the moment that she learned the full truth. Had they not had many sweet confidential talks together before this engagement and since? And during such talks had he not seen straight into her frank, disinterested young soul? Long ago, however, he had realized that her mother was the essence of cold-blooded, mundane ambition, and that she had sanctioned her daughter's betrothal from motives that were, in the main, sordid ones.

"Don't mention money-losses to your mother, my dearest," he said. "I would rather speak to her on that point myself." Then, with a meaning pressure of her hand, he added: "If I don't see you again this evening I shall be wretched. But I must talk with Kitty, and after that my poor uncle, who is half-crazed by the suddenness of this blow, will need me at his house. Still, I will try to get to you, but if I fail, forgive me and pity me!"

Very soon afterward Kathleen left with her mother. It chanced that Alonzo noted the parting look which Mrs. Kennaird swept about those luxurious rooms. It seemed to say, that look of hers, "My child will soon be installed here, mistress of all this grace and grandeur."

And Alonzo, with a secret catching of the breath, bethought himself of the dizzy downfall which this woman's ambition must soon sustain. He pitied her; it was his nature to do that; and yet already he could feel his spirit stirred against her by forces of antagonism and revolt. What trouble might she not make, in imperiously disappointed way, for the daughter whose bright nuptial future would have grown null? But, thank heaven, Kathleen's love was proof against all suasion of this merely sordid kind. Against that stanch fortress the maternal guns might thunder futile broadsides.

Just as Mrs. Van Santvoord was gliding from the room, her brother and she met face to face. He had been downstairs, putting the Kennairds into their rather shabby hired carriage. His eyes were sparkling a little unwontedly, and he had not the least hint of color.

"Oh, Kitty," he said, "I forgot to tell you something. I wish you'd stay here about ten minutes or so longer; won't you?"

"Stay?" whined Mrs. Santvoord; and she looked toward the gentleman at her side. He was her latest caprice, and she rarely appeared anywhere without him. He had an amber mustache and babyish blue eyes. "I've promised Mr. Pettigrew," she began, "that"——

"You'd walk home with him?" finished Alonzo. "Jack will excuse you this once, I'm sure." And he laid a hand on the shoulder of Mr. Pettigrew, who in-

stantly produced a smile that was a union of flawless teeth and two highly-developed dimples.

But when her Jack had gone and she was left alone in the vacated drawing-rooms with her brother, Mrs. Van Santvoord gave a long, bored sigh.

"I told them not to bring the carriage, Lonz," she fumed, dropping into a chair. "Hector said he might turn up, but he hasn't, and you know he never does any earthly thing that he promises he'll do. So now you'll have to send me home in your carriage, for it's freezingly cold outside, let alone being dark as pitch. And I ought to have got home an age ago. I refused the Bartholomews' dinner because it's a Patriarchs' ball night. Oh, I know you're not going because for some reason the Kennairds haven't been asked. But that's nothing to *me*, Lonz, you know, and I've promised to dance the cotillon with that dear, lovely Mark Manhattan."

"M — yes," replied Alonzo, musingly. "Is he the expected successor of Jack Pettigrew ?"

"Lonz ! how *can* you ?" reproached his sister. "The word 'successor' is perfectly insulting. I don't know what you *mean* by it !"

She was very pretty as she sat there before her brother, with her trim, neat figure, her clear-cut, supercilious little blond face, her Parisian gown and its harmonious adjunct of a jaunty bonnet. The late dance had given her cheeks a becoming pink tint ; her foes were apt to say of her that she was too pale, and perhaps a few of them said it because they wanted to tempt her into rouging, which would have been a

salient peg on which to hang their slurs. The "Hector" to whom she had just referred was her husband, whom she had married when she was only eighteen, eloping with him for that purpose, and whom it was whispered that she now gave a handsome yearly allowance in the double capacity of letting her alone and not appearing to let her alone too much. "Hector has every conceivable vice," she had said, not long ago, to her brother, "except that of incivility. He *is* so refreshingly polite to me. I dare say I might have tried to get a divorce from him three or four years ago, if it hadn't been for his beautiful manners."

Were the truth told about Kate Van Santvoord, it would have cast sad reflections upon her husband. She was one of those women who hunger, in their girlhood, for protective fondness, and to whom an early marriage is hence an agency teeming either with portentous misery or joy. Treated with decent marital respect, she might have made an excellent wife; treated quite the reverse of that, she had turned wifehood into a travesty. The aliment of frivolity on which she fed had augmented her natural feebleness of character. She was like a child foraging in a box of sugar-plums, which can be taken from it only with tragic shrieks and tears.

Alonzo dreaded something of this sort now. And yet the box of sugar-plums had to be taken away. There was no help for it.

"I always want to mean pleasant things when I talk with you, Kitty," her brother now replied. "I only wish that I could always mean to say them."

"You don't always try," she pouted, not at all comprehending him. "Just look how *other* women behave. I'd have you understand that I consider myself the — the pink of discretion!"

"You should liken yourself to a lily, my dear, and not a pink. Like the lilies of the field, you toil not, neither do you spin. But I'm afraid, Kitty, your . . . your vacation is over."

"My vacation over?" she queried, lifting her brows, staring at him, and, for the first time, perceiving that his face was colorless, and that there were drawn lines near his lips. But still no real suspicion of the truth came to her. "Oh, dear!" she exclaimed, "you're going to lecture me! you've heard something horrid about me, and you've believed it."

Alonzo smiled sadly, and for a moment lowered his look. "I've heard something horrid about both of us," he said, "and I'm compelled to let you know what it is." Then, amid silence, he lifted his eyes, and soon added: "It concerns our money. There's been a great loss." . . .

"A great loss?" was her cry, as she started up. "When? Where? How? Do you mean that any of *my* money has gone?"

"Yes." And as she again reseated herself, agitated and frowning, he pursued: "Kitty, what will you do when you've heard the entire truth, since you deport yourself like this on the mere threshold of it?" He at once proceeded to tell her the entire truth, and some time before he had ended she was almost in straits for breath.

"Oh, Lonz!" she at length gasped. "I — I can't think of myself as *poor!* It's too ghastly! Don't you believe there'll be anything left?"

"There's always something left, in these hideous affairs," Alonzo answered. "It's like a shipwreck; some kind of rubbish or another is sure to get washed ashore. I'm sorry for you, Kitty — awfully so. But the thing has got to be borne."

"Borne!" she almost shouted. I — I *can't* bear it, and I won't! Poor! Ugh! I — I *loathe* poverty!"

"Most people do."

"Oh, that vile Chichester! I always *did* detest him! He was commonness itself, with his twang, and his diamonds, and his negro coachman."

"I quite agree with you."

"He should never have been allowed in the firm," raved the sister of Alonzo. And then her flippancy broke through her despair, in ludicrous contrast to it. "He didn't only have a negro coachman, but once I met him at Saratoga in the morning with a white evening necktie."

"And he has ended criminally, as might have been expected."

"Oh, you *joke* about it!" moaned Mrs. Van Santvoord, bursting into tempestuous tears. "You'd — you'd joke at the cannon's mouth!"

"That would depend upon what the cannon's mouth happened to be saying. . . . But, Kitty, look here: philosophy in these cases can't but prove the wisest course" ——

"Philosophy! Pooh!" She had jumped up from

her chair and begun an excited promenade, pausing and turning every few seconds with a swish of her silken skirts. "Philosophy can't pay one's tradespeople for one. To be poor is to be low and contemptible. Oh, you needn't talk. I know life; I know the pettiness and nastiness of an empty purse. See here, Lonz!" And she suddenly shot up to his side and seized a lapel of his coat with trembling hand. "I shall go mad; I know I shall. I don't mean that it will break my heart; no doubt, Hector did that long ago, and I've been living on with the two pieces bumping one against another in my breast, and perhaps making me the restless, feverish creature I am. But if it doesn't break my heart it will break my brain." She snatched her hand away from him as he tried to take it, and then stooped her head while pressing a palm against either temple. At the same moment she gave vent to a shrill, hysteric laugh. Alonzo caught her in his arms and almost carried her to a lounge. . . . It was not till a good hour later that he accompanied her home in his own carriage. . . .

Her exhibition of terrified weakness had not, after all, struck him as strange. It was just what might have been expected of many a woman to whom the mere materialism of life had grown its dearest aim, its hardiest fundament. Heroism, nerve, resignation, acceptance of unforeseen ill, was not to be anticipated from such as she. And there were so many, he reflected, exactly like her. The very spinal cord of their feminine dignity and self-reliance was pride in the plethora of their pocket-books. "Thank God,"

he thought, while his sister's faint sobs broke above the rumbling wheels of the chill, dark carriage, "my Kathleen is made of sterner and better stuff!"

The Van Santvoords had lately gone into a spacious house on Fifth Avenue, within almost a stone-throw of the Park. Kitty had grand ideas of the way one should live now, when one's income permitted—and hers had certainly challenged extravagance. But it was extravagance tempered by charming taste. She never entered her own carriage without having three men to attend her thither. The appointments of her home were splendor itself, and yet free from the least vulgar taint. No one in town gave grander and yet choicer dinners, and her "house-warming," a few weeks ago, was pronounced marvelous for its blending of elegance and discretion.

Quite soon after he had entered her handsome home with his sister, Alonzo met his brother-in-law and shook hands with him as he had done hundreds of times before. But on no occasion, however, had the incident of either meeting or shaking hands with Hector proved at all agreeable. Alonzo's heart had no gloomy lairs in which hates could lurk comfortably, but it is doubtful if he ever came nearer to detesting any fellow-mortal than he did in the case of Kitty's husband. Hector was to him a cold, hard, bright animal, openly voluptuous and secretly cruel. It was easy to see how any sentimental young girl might have fallen madly in love with his heroic figure and his chiseled face and his large eyes of diamond darkness. But to Alonzo the man was so brutally

Philistine that he offered a constant personal explanation of his rankest follies. He had murdered all that was finest in his wife, and those who knew him best were well aware how strong a thrill of triumph had passed through him when Kitty's own imprudences had swelled into a striking offset against those which he himself had committed. "I can hit back, now, if she tries the divorce game," he had once brazenly said in an assemblage of intimates. The ribaldry reached Alonzo's ears, and did not tend to deepen his regard for its author.

On his own side Hector greatly disliked Alonzo. He considered him a person besotted with namby-pambyism, and fit only to loll at the feet of women sillier than himself. He thought that his pranks and capers were the most pointless bits of buffoonery, and that he was never so much in his element as when the recipient of reluctant giggles from disgusted observers. More than once, during wrangles with his wife, he had aired opinions of this cutting sort as to her brother; and Kitty, "for the sake of peace," as women often put it to themselves, refrained from breathing a word of these savageries to Alonzo. Meanwhile, as at present, the two kinsmen continued to interchange civil greetings when accident placed them in one another's path.

"Dinner's been waiting ages," Hector Van Santvoord now said, following his wife and Alonzo into a small reception-room off the main hall, a nook that was all one tender bloom of rose-color and silver. Hector himself was in full evening dress; the white

at his throat became him, as it does most dark men with features clean-cut.

His wife rested an arm on the mantel and stood there gazing downward, in mournful apathy. Alonzo began to draw off his gloves, and said, while doing so: "I think that . . Kitty had perhaps . . er . . supposed you . . er . . would dine out this evening."

He retained no idea of what words had escaped him a moment after he had thus spoken. It seemed necessary to break the awkward silence, and he had employed, with this purpose, a mechanical monotone.

Hector looked at his wife and shrugged his shapely shoulders. "I told you, Kitty," he grumbled, "that I would dine at home. . . . I might have sat down alone," he went on, still more ill-naturedly, after pausing for an answer, and receiving none; "but it occurred to me that you'd possibly bring some one home with you — not Alonzo, but Jack Pettigrew, or some one like that."

The sneer was evident, and as she perceived it Kitty raised her eyes. While she did so, her husband's look swept her face, and he plainly started.

"You've been crying," he said. "You're crying still. What's happened?"

Kitty, as if for answer, threw herself on a sofa and buried her face. Alonzo went to the open door and quietly closed it.

"A good deal has happened," he said to his brother-in-law. And then, with his discourse broken by his sister's audible tears, he spoke for some time.

The end of what he said left Hector extremely pale.

"Good God!" at length fell from him. "It's the most damnable thing! It's like—like a nightmare! I—I dare say I saw the suicide in the evening paper, but I always avoid reading those nasty things unless they're about people I know. And that fellow Chichester—why, I'd forgotten he was in the firm at all."

"His name's been conspicuous there for a number of years," returned Alonzo, with grimness.

"He was never fit to be Uncle Crawford's partner," exclaimed Kitty, lifting her head and clutching a tear-stained handkerchief in both hands. "He wasn't a gentleman, as I—I've often said. And now he's ruined us. For, even supposing we could save five or six thousand a year apiece, what would such a pitiful little sum be to *me?* What would ten thousand be—or even twenty? Oh, I wonder my hair isn't white already! Perhaps it may even come to living *in the country!* And I don't doubt all my diamonds will have to go! And—and my gowns will be sold round to anybody who'll take them, as Grace Hackensack's were when *her* husband went to smash!"

"You'd better wait till you know how things really are," muttered Hector, with lowered head and with hands in his pockets. "I dare say they'll turn out beastly enough." He glanced, here, at Alonzo, and with no gentle gaze. "Money neglected is apt to be money lost."

"Uncle Crawford never neglected his affairs," said Alonzo.

"Perhaps he didn't. But he's been getting on in

years. You were a partner in the concern, as well as he. But you only turned up there once a fortnight, and sometimes not even that."

"I never found myself wanted when I did turn up," said Alonzo, with indifference rather than good temper.

"That was because you took no interest in the concerns of the firm."

At this the brother-in-law of Hector slightly frowned. But he said, without the least harshness: "I could never master matters of business, and I think I was wise enough to realize that modesty alone makes us tolerate incompetence."

"Oh, pooh!" retorted Hector. "Idleness and laziness are not incompetence."

A flash left Alonzo's eyes then. "No," he replied. "If they were, you'd be an imbecile."

"Oh, come, now," scowled Hector. "I don't spend my time as *you* spend it!"

"True," Alonzo shot back. "You spend it in gambling; I don't. In drinking; I rarely drink. In the society of women whom you morally despise; to me that sort of woman is apt to be a dreary bore. . . . Ah, no, Hector; you're entirely right; we do *not* spend our time, you and I, in at all a similar way."

Hector was now pale with rage. It had never occurred to him till a few minutes ago that his brother-in-law's avoidance of the banking-house would bear disastrous fruit. But the horrible shock of recent tidings had made him anxious to pour blame on some

one, and his old dislike of Alonzo supplied, as it were, the needed victim.

"Well," he grumbled, tossing his head defiantly. "I don't strike attitudes in front of pictures and statues, and have fresh flowers brought to my bed before I get up of a morning, and change my clothes five times a day, and pretend I'm a great artist when I've hardly got a speck of real talent. At least I behave like a *man!*"

"Oh, no, Hector Van Santvoord," rang Alonzo's retort. "Pray *don't* flatter yourself that you've ever behaved like a man. A man, I mean, of either brains or principle!"

"Lonz! Hector! You mustn't quarrel," cried Kitty, springing from the sofa.

"I don't quarrel with blackguards," returned Alonzo; "I avoid them. But when one of them happens to be my brother-in-law and is insolent, plain speech can't be shirked."

"Oh, Lonz; now, *Lonz!*" she pleaded.

"You, Kitty," he went on, "have good reason to know what a blackguard that man really is. He stole you from your home when you were too young to understand the misery that such a match might bring on you. And afterward, having married you merely for your money, like the heartless trickster that he was, he soon turned marriage into the most horrid mockery. And such a man talks to me of idleness and laziness! The money my father left you has for years been his reason for steeping himself in both! It's an ill wind, as they say — and if this catastrophe brings him the

justice he deserves, it won't have been quite so bad a one after all." . . . .

Alonzo spoke with what for Hector was a new fire, a new force. He might have said thrice as much and yet kept within the bounds of veracious invective. Perhaps a qualm of conscience caused Hector to stand staringly silent; perhaps, like most men of a bullying turn, he was no match for nerve and pluck when they spring from unforeseen sources. Thus far he had known only the soft and indolent side of Alonzo, laughing with irony either patent or furtive when people declared the young man solid below all his lightness, or intellectual notwithstanding his frivolities. Abruptly Hector found himself confronted with a being of whom certain rumors had reached him, but whose actual existence he had till now discredited.

Alonzo returned his stare for several seconds, and then stooped down and kissed Kitty on the forehead; for by this time his sister was clinging to him in blended sympathy and fear.

"Excuse me," he said, in a voice greatly moderated. "I should not have spoken as I did — that is, not before you. . . . I'll see you or write you soon. Trust me, and good-by." Once out in the keen cold of the lamp-lit avenue, he asked himself if he had not really been right in rebuking, with whatever heat, the impertinence of a man who of all others might with best taste have bridled his tongue. The mental answer to this question was a vehement "yes." He had dismissed his carrirge at the Van Santvoords' door, expecting to dine with his sister. "Well," he

meditated, "one dines, if one can, in spite of all conceivable troubles — except it be a calamity to one's peptics." Gramercy Park was a good distance away; he did not feel like appearing at any of his clubs, and so he presently decided on the quiet restaurant of a modest up-town hotel. Here his appetite certainly proved slender, so busied were brain and heart with these late volcanic tidings, and with the lurid threat of to-morrow's fresh developments. But all the while he kept silently whispering to his unpalatable soup, his unengaging cutlet, that a heaven of tenderness, of compassion, of sacred fellowship, waited him from Kathleen when she should have learned just how greatly he stood in need of them all.

"But her mother — her mother," a voice within him seemed to urge. . . .

"Oh," he made mental answer to the voice, "why should *not* so radiant a rose have a big, sharp thorn? Let us allow that the mother is to be monstrously troublesome. That will only deepen the blessing of Kathleen's constancy."

III.

"MY dear," said Mrs. Kennaird, to her daughter, as they were being driven up-town together after quitting Gramercy Park, "I do hope Alonzo will not be late at dinner again to-day. People with great establishments need not mind delays of this kind, but we, in our detestable little Fifty-third Street flat, are quite destroyed by them."

"Alonzo isn't going to dine with us to-day, mamma," said Kathleen.

"No? And pray why not?"

Kathleen gave the reason, and her mother greeted it with a little scream. "Mercy! Suicide? And a partner in the banking-house! I wonder what *could* have been the cause? He didn't tell you? No? Perhaps it hasn't transpired yet. It couldn't have been money — oh, surely not! Their firm is almost like the Bank of England itself. As you know, dear, I made lots of inquiries when your engagement became probable. But one does so dislike to hear these wretched things. I declare, this has quite shaken me up. Chichester. . . . M — yes; he was not a person at all in society; no one ever heard of him at places. Possibly he was out of his mind when he did it. I think that I recall having heard he was in a fast set — not of people whom one meets, however; decidedly the reverse. If I am not mistaken, he was

connected in some vague way with the Lispenards; and the Lispenards (as I think I have told you once or twice before, my dear) were never of the least social importance till the father of Alonzo and Mrs. Van Santvoord married their mother. She, you know, was a Van Alstyne. Not that the Van Alstynes were by any means *real* Knickerbockers. I remember how poor, dear mamma used to say that some of the best houses in Bleecker and Bond Streets were shut to them. But they got to know the Manhattans, though for some reason the Amsterdams didn't respond. They were on good terms with the Poughkeepsies, though the Schenectadys held aloof. But when Sybilla Van Alstyne married Gardiner Lispenard, things began to change. Sybilla was ambitious, and threw round the Lispenard name a halo it had never shone with before. A truly delightful woman. I often see something of her in Alonzo. Too bad that she should have died in her forties! She had just begun to entertain with an air at her house in Lafayette Place, and all the best people were at her feet. Such pretty feet, too — and they never led her into any quicksands like those that her daughter's have dared to explore. You can't see a trace of her mother in Kitty. But Alonzo is like both parents. He hasn't his father's fine presence, though. We speak of birth making the gentleman, and I, for one, firmly believe in birth — why should I not? But Gardiner Lispenard, with not enough ancestry to make out under a microscope, was nevertheless a gentleman to his finger-tips. It keenly surprised me that his wife's

death should have killed him, as they say it did. He always seemed to be a person too high-bred for anything so sensational as dying of grief. And yet he went within two years of poor Sybilla, leaving both children to the guardianship of their uncle, Crawford. Society expected that Alonzo Van Alstyne, their maternal uncle, would be intrusted with the care of them, for Alonzo had a . . er . . more patrician kind of right to their custody, as one might express it, don't you know? He had got to be a good deal received, and he had drifted into one or two exclusive clubs, and his money would have made him a match, if he had only chosen to marry discreetly; while Crawford Lispenard, on the other hand, went nowhere, and had wholly neglected the chances of acquiring position. But, as it turned out, the early death of poor Alonzo (who left considerable money to his niece and his namesake nephew) rendered that existing plan the luckier one. And society remembered the children when they grew up. Even Kitty's mad elopement didn't alienate us. We couldn't forget, you know, that their papa and mamma had really once been *des nôtres*, notwithstanding that hermit of an uncle. . . . But I'm afraid I've mentioned all this before, my dear. It's a twice-told tale, is it not?"

"Yes," fell from Kathleen, as she sat in the dimness of the rolling vehicle, opposite her mother. She did not say anything more, and perhaps a note of abstraction or weariness in her tone caused Mrs. Kennaird to proceed, with some crispness:

"Remind me, my dear, when I fall into a train of

stale reminiscences. That is a sign of advancing years, and I wish to avoid all elderly follies, as I hope I have steered clear of all youthful ones. It is my wish not merely to grow old with grace, but with a certain interesting freshness — *de mine bon enfant*, you know. So many women, as they age, get careless about pulling themselves together. They sink into ruts, and stay there. I want to avoid that sort of thing. Society rewards one if one will only make an effort. Wrinkles and gray hairs are forgiven, I have observed, but never the tendency to be dull and tautological. You're passed over the instant you begin to be prolix — to construct your syntax with an excess of perfects and pluperfects. Now, I don't want to be passed over, and I intend to preserve a healthy cult for the present tense of things."

Kathleen smiled to herself in the gloom. She could not help wondering, just then, if her mother had ever spent a single wakeful hour in her whole life without serious reflections on the subjects of "society," "position," and "the people whom one meets."

No hardship or bereavement had ever served, indeed, to lessen in this lady's esteem the magnitude of these momentous questions. And, when all was told, she had been a woman whom neither hardship nor bereavement had spared. Her family (how often had Kathleen heard so!) was of genuine New Amsterdam stock, and as Margaretta Van Lerius, an only child, she had been reared in that ease which only wealth makes possible. But while she was yet a young

woman her father met with financial ruin, soon afterward dying. Margaretta had been a haughty belle, somewhat heavier in type than Kathleen, and not half so beautiful, but with the same graceful bearing and the same sculpturesque arms and neck. She held her head higher than did ever her daughter, and moved about with a statelier air. She was always thinking of a great marriage (even as a little girl she had dressed up her dolls in bridal robes for their weddings to imaginary princes or dukes); and when the family fortune had gone and she was obliged to live with her mother in a Ninth Street boarding-house, her matrimonial ambitions burned still more feverishly.

The Van Lerius kindred (uncles and aunts and cousins) would call upon her in these new and hated surroundings, and go away shocked by her worldliness and pride.

"Isn't it dreadful?" her mother would wail to them, whenever Margaretta was out of hearing. "Adversity hasn't humbled her a bit. She's just as grand in her ideas as ever she was."

Now had begun for Margaretta those drastic ordeals of economy from which nearly all her future life was to suffer. She persisted in "going out," for to stay in was torture. Her gowns often made a woful showing, but she always wore them with a feminine sovereignty of mien that was quite her own. Poverty had by no means crushed her; she aspired in a way still to lead her world, and the stress of her extreme energy and self-belief saved her from failure. Caste was then more thought of in New York than now.